



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Camas National Wildlife Refuge

*Planning Update 2, January 2011*



*Sunrise on Big Pond/USFWS*

## Thank You for Participating!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for Camas National Wildlife Refuge (NWR or Refuge). This plan will guide the management of the Refuge for the next 15 years. As part of this process, we have been seeking public input on management issues, concerns, and opportunities. This planning update provides information on the status of the planning process and what we have heard from people so far.

In June 2010, the Service mailed approximately 180 copies of Planning Update 1, along with a comment form, to local conservation and interest groups, conservation and research organizations, local, state and federal government agencies, Tribes, and others who have

expressed an interest in the planning process. The planning update was also posted on the Refuge website and was available at the Refuge office. Planning Update 1 described the CCP process, Refuge purposes, draft wildlife, habitat and public use goals, and preliminary issues to be considered in the CCP. Forty people and organizations submitted comments describing their concerns and providing suggestions for managing the Refuge.

This second planning update summarizes the comments received, and lists primary management issues that will be used to refine goals and objectives and draft management alternatives. We would like to thank everyone who has provided comments and we invite you to continue sharing your ideas with us. Your participation continues to be critical to the success of this planning effort.

### In This Update

What were your concerns? .....	Page 2
Key issues for the Refuge .....	Page 2
Refuge Vision Statement.....	Page 7
What's next? (upcoming meetings and milestones) .....	Page 8
Whom do I contact?.....	Page 8

## What Were Your Concerns for the Refuge?

The public scoping period for preparation of a draft CCP and EA for Camas Refuge opened on August 12, 2010, and ended on October 18, 2010. Two public meetings were held: the first in Hamer, Idaho, on August 25, 2010, and the second in Idaho Falls, Idaho, on August 26, 2010. At these meetings, Refuge staff explained the CCP process; Refuge purposes, vision, and management; and preliminary management issues, concerns, and opportunities that had been identified early in the planning process. They also answered questions from attendees and took written comments. A total of 16 private citizens attended the meetings, providing comments on issues and opportunities associated with management of Camas NWR.

A total of 41 comments were received during scoping, including verbal comments recorded at public meetings, written responses received from individuals or organizations, and comment forms

returned by mail or hand delivered to the Refuge. Some comments were about broad or long-range issues, while others suggested very specific or detailed strategies that could be used to achieve biological or public-use objectives. The CCP planning team reviewed and categorized the comments under the four major planning issues described in this update. For those who would like to see a detailed description of comments received during scoping, we have posted a Scoping Report on the Refuge website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/planning/main/docs/ID/docsCamas.html>.

Many comments came from people who visit the Refuge to observe and photograph wildlife or to hunt waterfowl. Most of the comments suggested changes to public-use programs on the Refuge, for example: expanding the areas where wildlife observation and photography, waterfowl hunting, and hiking are allowed; expanding

interpretation and environmental education programs; and partnering with other agencies and organizations that have common goals for the Refuge.

Comments were also received on topics related to wildlife and habitat, including improving wetland habitat quality, habitat restoration, water rights, water conservation, water level management, livestock grazing, agriculture crop management for waterfowl, invasive species, research, improving or expanding waterfowl habitat, climate change, and procedural compliance.

All of these issues will be considered in detail in the CCP. We are currently using your comments to develop preliminary management alternatives and develop draft goals and objectives. Many of your comments will also be helpful in developing strategies to meet the Refuge's biological and public-use goals and objectives as the CCP process continues.

## What Are the Key Issues for the Refuge?

### **Issue 1: How will the Refuge manage public-use opportunities while ensuring protection of fish, wildlife, and their habitats?**

#### A) Public Access and Wildlife Disturbance

Several commenters perceived current access to the Refuge as too restrictive. Some felt that managers of Camas NWR have decreased access in the last

several years, making it difficult to enjoy and photograph the Refuge. Several suggestions were provided for limited or seasonal public entry for motorized and non-motorized access.

Some respondents were not in favor of expanding recreational goals, whether hunting or other activities, which would detract from or alter the current Refuge character and its ability to provide uncrowded and non-conflicting recreational experiences. Many comments

requested that roads remain closed to all traffic during the nesting season. Some people requested that we continue to restrict all ORVs and overnight camping from the Refuge.

Some people thought that access from Camas NWR to the State of Idaho Mud Lake Wildlife Management Area was difficult. A request encouraged the Refuge to develop public easements with private landowners to improve public access between the sites.



*Service Response: Given current trends, it is likely that Refuge visitation will increase significantly over the next 15 years. The CCP will consider both the needs of wildlife and our legal mandate to provide compatible wildlife-dependent public use. Adverse impacts to wildlife and habitat will be considered when analyzing the environmental impacts of each alternative, as well as in compatibility determinations which will be updated as part of the final CCP.*

*Key questions that will be addressed include: which areas of the Refuge should be open to public use and which areas should remain undisturbed sanctuary? How much use can the Refuge accommodate? How and when should Refuge usage be balanced*

#### B) Consumptive Uses (Hunting and Fishing)

Several people stated specifically that they would like to see big game hunting allowed on Camas NWR. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) commented that strategies to control elk numbers at a sustainable level were needed to minimize depredation on surrounding private lands. Other comments included:

- The Refuge should release and manage for a large pheasant population.
- The Refuge should better mark open/closed areas, control coyotes, and ban lead shot on the Refuge.
- Hunting and trapping should not be allowed on Camas NWR. The term “refuge” should literally mean a safe place for all wildlife.
- There are adequate deer and

elk hunting opportunities on surrounding public lands; therefore opening the Refuge to big game hunting is not necessary.

- Hunting could pose a safety concern to others using the Refuge.

*Service Response: Elimination, expanding, and/or improving the quality of the hunt program will be considered in the alternatives development process of the CCP planning. The addition of big game as huntable species on the Refuge will also be assessed. The environmental impacts of each alternative, and the staffing and funding required for implementation, will be analyzed.*

#### C) Non-Consumptive Uses (Environmental Education, Refuge Interpretation, Wildlife Observation and Photography)

We received many comments citing the value, uniqueness, and importance of quality wildlife viewing opportunities offered at Camas NWR. Specific comments related to wildlife observation, photography, and other non-consumptive uses included:

- Camas NWR is the most easily accessible NWR from Idaho Falls, and as such, is the embodiment of what the Service is to many Southeast Idaho residents.
- Camas NWR currently does an excellent job of providing the public with information through existing kiosks and signage.
- Camas NWR should focus on increasing environmental education opportunities at the Refuge. Expand education opportunities for primary and secondary education and encourage volunteers

to help meet the potential increased demand for environmental education on the Refuge.

- Camas NWR could work with local photographers to establish photo blinds on the Refuge for public use.
- Construct viewing platforms.
- Allow horseback riding as a public use on the Refuge. Establish a horseback trail, away from the road network, to limit interference with other uses.
- Enough opportunities for horseback riding exist on neighboring federal lands.

*Service Response: In the CCP/EA, all public uses will be reviewed for appropriateness and compatibility. Expanding public-use programs on the Refuge by increasing the area and/or timing of use will be considered in alternatives development. The environmental impacts of each alternative, staffing, and funding will be analyzed. Compatibility determinations for all public uses will be updated as part of the final CCP.*



*Birdwatching is a popular activity with visitors /USFWS*

## Issue 2: How will the Refuge manage habitats to ensure the conservation of focal resources?

### A) Migratory Birds

Several respondents, including IDFG, documented the importance of the Refuge in providing stopover habitat for migrating songbirds. Comments stressed the need for protection of nesting songbirds and their associated habitat. Many expressed concern over Refuge removal of non-native Russian olive trees. It was suggested that native trees and shrubs be planted without the removal of Russian olive trees. Respondents requested we retain cottonwood trees as a component of Refuge habitat.

### B) Agriculture

Some people saw no need for the Refuge to produce agricultural crops or questioned whether depredation of crops on adjacent private lands was even a legitimate issue that we should address. Others, including IDFG, felt more farming should be done to provide forage for wildlife. IDFG supported adding more smaller farmed patches to the Refuge in strategic locations in order to improve habitat diversity for a number of wildlife species.

### C) Habitat Restoration

Many people provided comments on the importance of native habitats and habitat restoration. IDFG felt that there are some areas of the Refuge where restoration of native habitat should be a high priority. However, IDFG highlighted that in their opinion and experience, many rangeland restoration efforts are

difficult and often yield less than desirable results.

### D) Sage Grouse

IDFG provided comments highlighting the importance of the Table Butte area, which the Refuge is a part of, as a critical area for greater sage grouse. IDFG further believed that the Refuge should continue to maintain an emphasis on providing high quality sage grouse brood habitat through agriculture plantings and managed wetlands.

### E) Invasive Species

Several respondents were concerned about invasive species, in particular state listed noxious weeds, that exist on Camas Refuge and felt more control efforts may be necessary.

*Service Response to A-E: Providing quality wildlife habitat (including water quality and quantity) will be a priority in the development of the CCP/EA, since this is both the purpose of the Refuge and part of the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.*

*In the CCP, the Service will explore the most appropriate strategies for providing forage for migratory waterfowl, stopover habitat for migratory songbirds, and breeding, brooding, and wintering habitat for sage grouse. Raising crops and*

*prescribed burning are some of the strategies that we may use to meet our goals and objectives, and will be considered during development of Refuge management alternatives.*

*The control of invasive species has been, and will continue to be, a major management focus for us. One of the key questions that will be considered in developing management alternatives is which areas will be prioritized for treatments and whether those treatments will involve eradication or suppression.*

### F) Livestock Grazing

Several respondents suggested that cattle and/or sheep and goats be allowed to graze on the Refuge to reduce the prevalence of weeds. Other comments related to livestock grazing included:

- Domestic livestock, and the associated fences, should never be allowed on Camas NWR again.
- A research study is needed to assess impacts from grazing on habitat, wildlife, and invasive species before a decision on livestock grazing is made.
- Replace prescribed fire



*A weasel makes use of Refuge equipment/USFWS*



operations with cattle grazing to reduce fuels and invigorate plants.

*Service Response: This issue is outside the scope of the CCP. The Department of the Interior and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service were sued on October 22, 1992, for alleged violations of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, the Refuge Recreation Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act. The suit alleged incompatible secondary uses were being permitted on nine refuges and that the Department of the Interior was failing to follow legal requirements in allowing similar uses throughout the Refuge System. Livestock grazing was specifically cited in the suit as an incompatible secondary use at Camas NWR.*

*The suit was settled out of court on October 20, 1993. The settlement agreement made several direct decisions on secondary uses on the National Wildlife Refuges identified in the suit. Through the settlement agreement, the Service discontinued grazing at Camas NWR in 1994. Grazing appropriateness and compatibility will not be re-evaluated in the development of the Camas NWR CCP/EA as a future management strategy.*

### **Issue 3: How will the Refuge manage water, water rights, and infrastructure to best accomplish Refuge purposes?**

The majority of respondents expressed concern over the lack of water on Camas NWR. Other comments on this issue included:

- Camas NWR belongs to the people of the United States and that groundwater irrigators are

depriving the Refuge.

- The Refuge needs to proactively protect and ensure that its water rights are upheld.

Water management suggestions received included avoiding a reduction in the number of wetland acres, managing wetlands only in wetland soil types, providing shallower wetlands for shorebirds, improving water delivery to the south end of the Refuge, and providing water for wintering elk.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) commented that the EA should identify water bodies that fail to meet water quality standards (Section 303 (d) waters), which waters may be impacted by CCP actions, the nature of potential impacts, and specific pollutants likely to impact those waters.

*Service Response: One of the highest priorities within this CCP will be the consideration of the most efficient and appropriate use of water and wetland habitats. In the CCP, the Service will explore the most appropriate options for improving wildlife habitat. We will consider water management alternatives for Refuge wetlands and the benefits and impacts to focal wildlife species.*

*The CCP and associated EA document will additionally develop strategies to protect Refuge water rights and the best application and water infrastructure required to manage those rights consistent with Idaho water law.*

*The CCP will also address water quality, contaminants, and dredge and fill issues, consistent with Section 303 (d) and 404 of the Clean Water Act.*

### **Issue 4: What role will the Refuge play in management of resources at the landscape scale?**

#### **A) Water Conservation**

Several respondents suggested we look at ways to conserve or make better use of the available water to which we currently have access. Suggestions focused on transporting water through pipes or lined delivery ditches and to spread bentonite or place pond liners in wetlands to decrease or eliminate percolation of surface water into the ground. IDFG commented that the Refuge should explore opportunities for basin-wide solutions to declining groundwater tables, rather than adapt management to “live with” a drier Refuge. Another comment suggested that we remove all old levees that are no longer in use.

*Service Response: Providing quality wildlife habitat (including water quality and quantity) will be a priority in the development of the CCP/EA, since this is both the purpose of the Refuge and part of the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. It is also a priority at Camas NWR to provide water to the wetland habitat via the most environmentally conscious avenue (i.e., using methods that are cost effective while reducing the Refuge’s carbon footprint).*

*Through the CCP process, the Service will examine natural resources at the Refuge and ecosystem level, and how this information can be incorporated into management of the Refuge.*

## B) Climate Change

A comment encouraged the Service to consider and analyze the impacts of climate change in the CCP. Specifically, the Service should:

- Incorporate the role of climate change in shaping future conditions in the Refuge Vision Statement;
- Address ongoing environmental threats, including the synergistic effects of climate change and other stressors;
- Include an assessment of water resources;
- Include a plan to inventory and monitor climate change-related variables and trends; and
- Include climate change information in Environmental Education programs.

IDFG also considered climate change a significant issue in relation to Refuge wetland management. They commented that any wetland losses at Camas Refuge would be contrary to national wetland and waterfowl conservation goals for mitigating climate change.

The EPA also commented on climate change and requested that we evaluate how climate change may effect hydrology, weather patterns, precipitation, and chemical reactions. The EPA further suggested that the CCP disclose greenhouse gas emissions from proposed actions under the plan and identify mitigation measures to reduce emissions.

*Service Response: Through the CCP process, the Service will assess what is known about global*

*climate change and how it may affect the species and ecosystems that depend on the Refuge, which issues can be further studied at the Refuge and ecosystem level, and how this information can be incorporated into Refuge*

## C) Refuge Expansion

Comments pertaining to Refuge expansion included:

- The Refuge should purchase the lands between Camas NWR and Mud Lake Wildlife Management Area.
- The Refuge should actively pursue the purchase of additional water rights for the Refuge.
- The Refuge should purchase land up-gradient to reduce aquifer depletion by irrigators.
- The Refuge should cease land acquisition or water right purchases, as there is no real need for taking more land off the tax rolls.

*Service Response: The Service works with its partners and local landowners to identify lands that are of conservation value, and potential acquisition interest due to their high potential to add to the habitat values of the Refuge. The process of identifying lands for potential acquisition may occur through the CCP process, or through separate land protection planning efforts. Any land or water rights would be purchased only from willing sellers.*

## **General Comments Received**

Several suggestions were received for the Refuge to form a friends group that could help with public



*Great horned owl/USFWS*

use and management. Others suggested that we cooperate closely with area farmers or foster more public partnerships, such as Dubois Grouse Days.

*Service Response: We are currently working with interested parties to establish a Friends of Camas NWR group. Through the CCP process, the Service will examine additional partnership opportunities and how this information can be incorporated into management of the Refuge.*

One respondent felt that an EA is not sufficient for National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) compliance and suggested that we complete an Environmental Impact Statement.

*Service Response: The CCP/EA will comply with the Council of Environmental Quality's guidelines for implementation of NEPA.*





*Snow geese in flight/USFWS*

## Vision Statement for Camas NWR

*Long before Camas NWR was established, Camas Creek and natural springs fed wetlands in the high desert of the northern Snake River plain. These wetlands provided an important stopover for migrating waterbirds, a water source for pronghorn and mule deer, and wet meadows where sage grouse found abundant insect life that nourished their broods. With its year-round water, Sandhole Lake was a place where hunting parties of Shosone and Bannock, and stagecoach and wagon drivers, stopped to rest their tired animals. Today, Camas NWR offers another type of respite, where nature lovers can enjoy a deep orange sunrise pierced by the Grand Tetons to the east, a pure white V-formation of snow geese pressed against a brilliant blue sky, or the fall ritual of a bull elk bugling as he gathers his herd. Birders spend countless hours looking for rare warblers along the banks of Camas Creek, and photographers try their skill at capturing a pair of trumpeter swans coming in for a landing on Big Pond. Even during the harsh eastern Idaho winter, visitors enjoy the sight of bald eagles returning to their favorite winter roost sites on the Refuge.*

*In the future, Camas NWR will continue to provide wetland and sage steppe habitat for migratory birds and other native wildlife. The Refuge will serve as a model of well-planned habitat restoration and sustainable use of water and other natural resources in a changing environment. More emphasis will be placed on environmental education and commitment to reducing our dependency on non-renewable energy sources. It will continue to be a place where people come to rejuvenate themselves and learn about their role in the natural environment.*



**U.S. Department of the Interior**  
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**Comments or Suggestions? Contact Us**

Address comments, questions, and requests for further information to:

Brian Wehausen, Refuge Manager  
Camas National Wildlife Refuge  
2150 East 2350 North  
Hamer, Idaho 83245

Or email your comments to:  
FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov or brian\_wehausen@fws.gov  
(Please place “Camas NWR CCP” in the subject line.)

Visit our website at <http://www.fws.gov/camasnwr/>

**What’s Next? Upcoming Meetings and Milestones**

Public Review/Comment on the Draft CCP/EA ..... Fall 2011  
Final CCP ..... Summer 2012